



Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

THE DEGRADATION OF KWANG.

By CARLTON DAWE.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART I.



HOUGH ostensibly a most excellent servant of the State, and one devoted to the interests of his imperial master, the 'Son of Heaven,' it was nevertheless suspected by Cheng-Li, and one or two of the more intimate advisers of the Emperor, that Kwang, the Viceroy of Shantung, was trying to serve two masters—or, rather, a master and a mistress. Kwang was a man of much learning and an administrator of high qualities; but though he had travelled extensively in Europe, and had seen the infinite blessings of Western civilisation, he still remained a reactionary of the most pronounced type, one who viewed with alarm the progressive tendencies of Cheng and a few other important officials. He was an old man steeped to the lips in an effete conservatism—a system with which one could hardly expect him to quarrel, since it had made him one of the richest of his master's subjects. Many blessings were expected from Kwang's visit to Europe; but it was undertaken at too late a period of his life: he had become too much imbued with tradition. Your Oriental possesses a splendid languor which makes him and his country an easy prey to the energetic foreigner. Were it not for the clashing interests of the white races, the black and the yellow would long since have forgotten the word 'independence.'

It was said that Kwang was one of the most powerful of the adherents of the Empress. It was well known that she viewed with inconceivable rancour all progressive tendencies; and in those days her views were worthy of the most serious consideration; for she was quietly but surely gripping the reins of power which were falling from the feeble hands of the Emperor. That she was a woman of intellect no one who knew her doubted. Skilled in intrigue was she, unscrupulous, daring: one who had the head to form a plan and the courage to carry it out. In

espousing her cause against the monarch, Kwang was not quite the fool he appeared to be.

Occasionally a stray rumour reached us from Shantung which reflected little credit on the government of Kwang. Now the people in the streets of Tsi-nan were insolent to foreigners, or now it was some trouble over a concession granted, from which the Viceroy had not pocketed as much 'squeeze' as he had confidently expected; but, whatever his misdemeanours, he was sufficiently privileged to escape punishment. An old servant of the State is not lightly to be cast off; and, after all, the 'squeeze' is recognised in high political circles. If a Viceroy cannot make his fortune in three or four years he earns the illustrious contempt of all right-thinking persons. All that is asked of him from Peking is that he shall see that the peace is kept.

No one knew better than Kwang how to repress the populace. His excellent rule had become a byword in official quarters. His memorials to the throne were models of art and literary elegance. There was no man in the whole of China who could pay a compliment with a more modest grace. He was the learned and gallant figure of officialism; one who had grown gray—and rich—in the service of the State; a model for the beginner, a source of exalted felicity to his own class.

Yet, as I have stated, the province of Shantung was acquiring a reputation for misgovernment which was likely to reflect little credit on those responsible for public order. Riots of a more or less serious nature had of late been much too frequent in and about the capital; and due representations had been made to the Tsung-li-Yamen by the foreign Powers interested. As well try, however, to check the ruin of a falling house of cards as hope to make the Celestial profit by advice. The warning, no doubt, was duly pigeon-holed; it is even probable that the Viceroy had been warmly remonstrated with;

and there the matter ended. Something very serious would have to happen, and some serious pressure applied, before officialdom would stir. Threats are a vain thing; the Oriental moves only when you kick him.

Then one day, or rather one night, something serious did happen in Tsi-nan. Two foreign houses were sacked and burnt, and five Europeans were killed by the angry mob. At a preconcerted signal—so it seemed—the rabble, led by a certain mysterious individual of diminutive stature, came swarming up out of the alleys and byways, and attacked the two solitary houses. The burnings and the bloodshed that followed sent a thrill of horror through every white man and woman in the land; and, even in Peking, officialdom recognised that this was a very serious matter. Kwang, it is true, had made some mistakes, but never one so fatal as this. It so happened that the victims of this outrage were English, and, as a consequence, a severely worded protest was submitted to the consideration of the Tsung-li-Yamen. The Chinese were given to understand that the English Government insisted upon a severe punishment of those who had been guilty of this outrage, and it, moreover, demanded that the Viceroy Kwang should instantly be degraded from office.

The reply of the Tsung-li-Yamen was couched in the most apologetic and conciliatory tone. Justice should be done; those guilty of such an atrocious outrage on the laws of hospitality should suffer the extreme rigour of the law. There were plenty of promises—there always are where the Oriental is concerned—but there was precious little fulfilment. It is true that some half-dozen wretches were apprehended and summarily decapitated; but every one knew that the whole proceeding was a farce, and that the real culprits were enjoying the protection of those in high places. Kwang had not been degraded; and while the English did nothing but protest, there was little likelihood of such an event being consummated. The amiable old gentlemen who regulate the affairs of empire from the arm-chairs of Downing Street may be great theorists, but you want something more than theory as a reply to rapine and slaughter.

I believe it was the personal wish of the Emperor that Kwang should be relieved of his office; but there was a power behind the throne—a power against which the Emperor was powerless, and Kwang still sat in state in the Yamen at Tsi-nan. Then, with the execution of the alleged culprits, the English communications grew less strenuous, until at last they ceased altogether. The Chinese authorities had made some show of reparation, and the 'firm' despatches of England would read well in a subsequent Blue-Book. The world would see that the life of a British subject was sacred. Really, my Lord Mulberry, you are a heaven-born Minister; but don't you know that

one warship cleared for action, with a little moral courage behind it, would be enough to effect the degradation of every Viceroy or Governor throughout the whole eighteen provinces of the Celestial Empire?

With the closing of this unfortunate incident, out of which Kwang emerged with added laurels, the power of that excellent gentleman became solidified as it were, and people began to talk of him as the Great Viceroy, and predicted for him an eminence in the State which would loom large in the future; for it was well known that the powerful Empress was his friend, and with such a guardian there were no heights to which a man might not aspire. On the other hand, there were those who viewed with alarm the increasing influence of the great reactionary, and who, apart from the wish to dethrone a rival, saw in the power of such men as Kwang the real danger to their country.

Among these there was none more distressed at this state of things than my old friend Cheng-Li. Cheng and I had been good friends for many years, and the kindly hints he had dropped into his master's ears on my behalf had not been without their effect. I, on the other hand, had proved upon more than one occasion that his confidence had not been misplaced. One night he came to me, a look of intense gloom clouding his usually cheerful face. I brought out whisky and cigars—for Cheng had long since learned to appreciate the luxuries of civilisation—and otherwise added to the gloom of the occasion by chatting indifferently on indifferent subjects. At last, seeing that he was intensely preoccupied, I suggested that he was weary; for there is nothing that I detest more than the entertaining of a man who is in no mood for entertainment.

'Very weary, Clandon,' he replied, 'and not a little perturbed.'

'What is it that ruffles your illustrious serenity?'

'Ah, my friend, there is always something to ruffle one's serenity in these days. How thankful you must be that you are not Chinese!'

Candidly, I was; but I could not tell him so. Personally, I could not imagine a more horrible fate.

'Oh,' I said, 'one always invests in a foolish prejudice in favour of one's own country. But, my dear Cheng, I am sorry to hear of this perturbation. What has caused it?'

'We live in strange times, friend Clandon, and Heaven itself only knows what the next day is going to bring forth.'

'"A house divided against itself cannot stand,"' I quoted.

'True; and we are in the position of that house. I fear the climax which must come. Tell me'—and he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, lest the very walls should hear—'who is going to win—Emperor or Empress?'

I had never known him put the question so boldly, though I had long been aware of his trend of thought. The suggestion in itself was treason of the most heinous nature. Affairs were indeed assuming an alarming outlook when courtiers talked in this fashion.

'Victory will of course go to the stronger side.'

He smiled at my reticence. 'But which is the stronger side? Ah, my dear Clandon, after all you are but a looker-on, though sometimes even I forget that you are not one of us.'

'In England we say that the looker-on sees most of the game.'

'What sees your surprising wisdom?'

'Many things, O Cheng! which augur ill for many people, among whom I count more than one good friend.'

'Even so. The burden of empire falls heavily upon weak shoulders. Clandon, the Emperor is being openly set at defiance.'

'By whom?'

'The Woman!' he said harshly. 'Curious anomaly—is it not?—that in China, where woman suffers the degradation of being woman, a woman should rise to the supreme control.'

'But she has not yet risen to that dazzling eminence.'

'I am not so sure. It is a question even now who governs. I fear it will hardly be a question much longer.'

There was nothing new in this either. The Emperor, a poor, weak creature who meant well, was bound to succumb to the master-mind.

'Why not recognise the inevitable, and make terms with fate?'

'Being a courtier, I ought; but, being a man, I can't. Moreover, I am already "suspect." I do not think Her Majesty would welcome anything which concerned me, except, possibly, the news of my death. She knows that it is I who have supported the demand of England for the degradation of Kwang, that it is I who have paved the way of progress which the Emperor is inclined to tread, and that it is I who would willingly throw overboard all the tradition which hampers our advancement among the nations of the earth. This does not suit the book of Her Majesty and those who support her.'

'They are powerful?'

'So powerful, my dear Clandon, that they can thwart the will of the Son of Heaven. He had practically decided upon the degradation of Kwang, who is too powerful to be well loved. But influence has been brought to bear. The Emperor is a weak, vacillating creature, and Kwang is still the Viceroy of Shantung.'

'The cause?'

'Though it may easily be guessed, it is not for me to ask. However, this I do know, that His Majesty is hemmed in by traitors, and that, however much he may believe in Kwang's guilt,

and would like to punish him, he has not the power.'

'After all, it is just possible that Kwang may be innocent of any complicity in the outrage.'

'It is possible, but highly improbable. I know His Majesty would do much for the man who could prove conclusively the complicity of Kwang.'

These words he uttered slowly, and in a tone which was full of meaning. Quickly my eyes sought his. Cheng and I understood each other.

'Then you think that His Majesty would willingly degrade Kwang if a favourable opportunity presented itself?'

'Kwang, as I have said, is too powerful to be popular with the Emperor. Occasionally it happens that the subject outpaces the master. It is not a wise thing to do—especially here in China. Kwang is rich; the victims of this riot were "only foreigners," and the Emperor is a Manchu. Many causes, you see, why even an Emperor should hesitate.'

'But I understand this affair at Tsi-nan has been thoroughly sifted, and that the ringleaders have been executed?'

'Apparently. Certain men have been executed, among them being the alleged leader; but from the data to hand we learn that the individual who led the mob on that night was a diminutive, broad-shouldered person with a flowing white beard. No man answering to this description was executed at Tsi-nan.'

'The police have been set to work?'

'Yes; but you must understand that they are Kwang's police.'

'Precisely. And you would have me attempt'—

'I would have you attempt to discover the relationship between His Excellency the Viceroy and this diminutive leader of riots.'

'Um! Should Kwang not wish this diminutive person's identity discovered?'

'I need not hide from you the fact that I believe such to be the case.'

'Consequently there is danger in the mission?'

'Without doubt; but I have yet to learn that a little danger would frighten the Emperor's Watch-dog.'

'I can assure you, my dear Cheng, that the Emperor's Watch-dog is an inconceivably timid creature.'

He smiled, and really his smile was a greater compliment than his words.

'The protection of such a "timid creature" would ensure me infinite consolation. Clandon, I am not betraying the imperial confidence when I tell you that the Emperor would look with considerable approbation upon the man who could supply him with the motive for the removal of Kwang. Not alone does his influence exceed that of a mere subject, which from the imperial point of view is utterly intolerable; but he is

a reactionary of the most pronounced order, and consequently a great danger to the State. His Majesty is not ignorant of the friendship between Kwang and the Woman, and he already recognises that her path and his traverse diverse lines. With the proof in his hands of the Viceroy's complicity in this outrage, I think the Son of Heaven may be trusted to deal summarily with Kwang.'

'Times have changed,' I said.

Cheng looked very serious.

'Truly,' he answered, 'it is the old order giving way to the new, and it has at last reached us in our isolation. Fancy the Emperor of China having to find a reason for the dismissal of a servant! It is enough to make the old Mings rise in their graves.'

'We must take the times as we find them, friend Cheng. There are opportunities now, as in the old days, for the man of character.'

'Yes,' he muttered, 'the man of character;' and I knew that his thoughts reverted to the man of destiny—the poor, vacillating figure-head who was the ostensible ruler of four hundred millions of human beings.

Well, we talked the matter over for some considerable time, duly weighing the pros and the cons of the case; and it resulted in a half-hearted acceptance on my part of the mission proposed by Cheng. Not that I any longer felt the least scruple in thwarting the plans of the Empress or her creatures. Since I had acted as courier into Shansi for Her Imperial Majesty, I had something by which I could remember her exalted magnanimity. The Empress and I had still a little account to settle.

It would have been a real pleasure for me to cross this woman if I could only have depended upon receiving proper support; but the man behind me was but the shadow of an emperor. With proper guidance he might have shown some firmness in the regulating of affairs; he might even do so still if the opportunity came, or the right adviser appeared at his

elbow; but, situated as he was, there was little hope of aid or advancement. The result of one's work, if successful, would be received with consummate satisfaction; but if failure attended the effort, the imperial protection would be of the scantiest. That he would welcome the downfall of the Woman was extremely credible; but that he would sanction any act which might lead to that desirable result was not to be entertained for a moment. So was it even in this case of Kwang. Though ardently desiring the removal of that distinguished official, he had not the moral courage to sign the decree. As Cheng said, it was enough to make the members of the Ming dynasty turn in their graves.

Nevertheless, this adventure had a side which appealed distinctly to me, and one which carried more weight than the gratification of the Emperor. To remove Kwang from Shantung would mean the practical alienation of the whole province, a heavy blow to the prestige and power of the Empress. Pe-chi-li, I knew, was hers, and Shansi also, with Heaven only knows how many more provinces; but none was better than Shantung, or more rich in promise. Moreover, I had not forgotten my murdered compatriots. The English demands had ceased of late, and as a consequence the officials made mock of her power. I wanted badly to show these supercilious, slit-eyed yellow men that when England said a thing she meant it; that her strength was not all in words, though, God knows, she had been showing the world nothing but words for many and many a year.

There were many reasons, therefore, why I should endeavour to bring the great Viceroy to book; and once I had accepted the project as a remote possibility, it gradually grew in favour. Not that in my heart of hearts I believed any effort would save the situation. Nature herself seemed to have set her finger upon the decaying fragments of empire; and as the leaf withers and falls, so would fall this monstrous anomaly of a government.

A CHAT ABOUT LIGHTSHIPS.



HERE is an enormous amount of interesting information to be gained during a holiday at the seaside; but, generally speaking, we take everything for granted in such an easy-going manner that we let slip the opportunity of gaining this information on the spot. It is only after returning to town that we wonder what such-and-such a thing was for, and feel annoyed that we did not ask a few questions.

Among the most interesting of these objects

are lightships, those red-coated sentinels of the sea which keep watch near the perilous sands and treacherous shoals on our coast. The floating lights are under the jurisdiction of the Trinity House; but as few people know what the Trinity House is, perhaps a few words as to the origin of this ancient corporation—which is of greater antiquity than the British navy, and, of course, than the standing army—would be of interest to the reader.

The Corporation of Trinity House received its first charter from King Henry VIII.; but it

existed long before that time as a Company of Shipmen (or sailors) for maintaining almshouses for old and destitute sailors, building and protecting sea-marks and fire-beacons for the guidance of mariners, and the supplying of pilots. The original title of the Trinity House is 'The Guild, Fraternity, or Brotherhood of the Most Glorious and Undivided Trinity and of St Clement, in the Parish of Deptford in the County of Kent.'

As shipping increased, so the responsibilities of the Trinity House increased, for to the Elder Brethren was entrusted the supervision of coast-lights, buoys, and beacons, besides many other duties for the benefit of the sailor. At present, however, we have only the lightships under consideration.

Roughly speaking, lightships are only used where it is impossible or inexpedient—on account of the shifting nature of the shoal—to build permanent lighthouses; and the first one to be placed in position was the well-known *Nore*, in the year 1732. At the present time there are sixty round the British coasts. The English lights are painted red and those on the Irish coast black, with the name in huge white letters on both sides. At the mast-head there is a large wooden globe or cage called the day-mark. The lantern encircling the mast is about ten feet high, and contains a number of argand lamps and reflectors, twenty-one inches in diameter, arranged in groups on a frame, which a beautifully regulated clockwork apparatus causes to revolve, and the result is those brilliant flashes of light which practically spell the name of the light-vessel to passing ships, for every light has some distinguishing characteristic, either in the period or colour of the flash.

Even when the lightship is rolling or pitching in a heavy sea the light remains horizontal, as the lamps and reflectors are hung on gimbals, so as to give them free-play in all directions.

Foggy weather entails additional work for all hands, as a powerful fog-horn, driven either by steam or compressed air, is kept working while the fog lasts. By means of high and low blasts from the trumpet, the sailor is informed what lightship he is passing, each fog-signal as well as each light having its own distinguishing characteristic.

When one on a summer holiday sees a floating light lying almost 'as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean,' he is apt to think that a lightsman's life is also an idle one, and that there cannot be much real hard work attached to the calling. But to fully appreciate his responsibilities the landsman should go on board in mid-winter, when the nights are long, and when the fog hangs round the coast for days and sometimes weeks continuously. Being stationary, and generally lying right in the track of navigation, lightships are liable to the risk of being run down by passing vessels, especially during foggy

weather. But collisions are not confined to foggy weather only, for we read some time ago of the barque *Palawan* of Liverpool running into and sinking the *Kentish Knock* on a perfectly clear day. Three minutes after being struck the lightship foundered, the crew having barely time to save their lives by climbing on board the colliding vessel.

Unlike ordinary ships, which, if necessity arises, can generally run into harbour for safety, lightships must remain at their stations while the waves lash themselves into fury and break in a seething mass of foam upon the adjacent sands. To be able to do this, of course, very strong moorings are necessary; and strong they certainly are, for attached to a mushroom-anchor weighing two tons is a chain made of one and a half inch iron, which, before being used, is tested link by link to bear a tensile strain of twenty-three tons per square inch; while here and there a huge swivel is let in to prevent kinking when the vessel swings round at her moorings. From two hundred to three hundred fathoms of this enormous chain-cable are on board each lightship, and it is paid out or hauled in as the occasion demands.

The crew of a lightship consists of eleven men: the master, mate, three lamplighters, and six seamen; but only seven men are on board at the same time. The master and mate change places every month; but the others are relieved only once in two months. The Trinity House steam-vessels start with the relief crews on or about the fifteenth of each month, and on their return the men brought on shore are employed on the wharf chipping, cleaning, and painting buoys or in other similar work.

Of course it is essential that the lamps and apparatus should be kept scrupulously clean and ready for immediate use, and this work occupies much of a lightsman's time during the day; but there are also other duties to be performed. The officer, too, has to keep his log, a weather report, and the daily account of the expenditure of oil and other stores. In passing, it may be noted that about six hundred gallons of oil are consumed on board annually.

One of the crew is constantly on the lookout during the day for vessels running into danger. When a ship is sighted in this predicament a gun is fired to attract her attention, and two flags hoisted, which mean, 'You are standing into danger.' The firing is continued until the vessel alters her course and steers in a safe direction; but it occasionally happens that in spite of this warning the ship goes ashore and is wrecked. A few years ago the only way a lightship could render assistance in such an emergency was to fire guns and rockets to summon the lifeboat; but nowadays, thanks to the telephones fitted on board the more important lightships, the officer just 'rings up' the shore, and gives the exact

position of the vessel in distress, and in a short time tugs and lifeboats are on their way to assist the ship and crew. Before long, perhaps, even the telephone may be superseded by wireless telegraphy, as successful experiments have already been carried out between the East Goodwin Light and the South Foreland.

Life on board a lightship is necessarily very monotonous, the fact that the vessel is stationary having a very depressing effect upon some members of the crew. There are always plenty of good books on board to while away the watch below;

but many of the men pass their spare time in modelling, boxmaking, wood-carving, and even bootmaking, and dispose of the articles during their month on shore. The Elder Brethren of the Trinity House do all in their power to make the men happy and contented with their lot. They receive good wages, and all the new hands have a prospect of promotion some day to the rank of master of a lightship; they receive a free life insurance policy, a uniform, free medical attendance, and a good pension when they are too old for further service.

OUR LADY OF DELIVERANCE.

By JOHN OXENHAM.

CHAPTER VII.—THE ARRIVAL OF THE DEVIL.



NEXT day, as I sat smoking on the bench of Vaurel's cottage after breakfast, I noticed at once a change in the look of the Château. It was no longer quite blind. Two of the brown wooden shutters upstairs were thrown back, and the windows were wide open. It gave the house a more cheerful look, and I took it as a sign of the revival of hope and interest in life on the part of its mistress.

'*Tiens!*' said Vaurel when he noticed it; 'they are wakening up down there.'

We crossed in the punt, and fished down the other side of the river below the weir. As we progressed slowly past the house, with the width of the river and the grassy stretch beyond between us and it, we saw the old priest and mademoiselle slowly pacing the terrace, the old man talking earnestly, mademoiselle listening, it seemed to me, perforce, and with the manner of one who would have preferred being left alone.

The priest caught sight of us, and stopped to look, and possibly to ask his companion who we were. They were still pacing so, the priest turning sideways to her in his argumentation, and mademoiselle a little in front as though impatient of his importunity, when we passed out of sight round the bend. I could hear Vaurel growling curses on the 'crow' as long as he could see him. He said nothing to me; but he was not fortunate in his fishing, and presently I almost fell over him where he lay in the grass, having thrown aside his rod in disgust.

'It does not go to-day,' he growled; 'the sight of Old Crow yonder pecking away at mademoiselle has upset my humour. God made men and women, but the devil made the priests.'

'Tut! you are feeling bad, my friend. One would think you had suffered from their peckings yourself.'

'That I would not mind. But mademoiselle!

it is different. She is all alone, and with no one to help her. Oh! he will gobble her whole—lands and money and all. A big belly and a wide-open mouth has the Church, and an appetite that grows on feeding.'

I also dropped my rod and sat down in the grass, then filled my pipe and handed him my pouch.

'See here, Vaurel, my friend, let us talk. Tell me all you can about Gaston des Comptes. Can you see any daylight through the matter yourself?'

'*Sapristi!* I did not know you knew anything about the matter,' he said in surprise.

'Of course I know about it. Why should I not know what all the world knows?'

He was evidently much puzzled at my sudden accession of knowledge, and filled his pipe between his knees ruminatingly, glancing doubtfully up at me now and again from under his brows.

'You do not believe he has done this thing?' I said.

'*Mon dieu!* No!' he said, with sudden heat, for which I liked him all the more.

'Very well, then. We are of the same opinion, that mademoiselle's brother is the victim of—shall we say some terrible blunder?'

'Or worse,' he growled. 'I tell you, monsieur, if the men at headquarters are no better than the men who fooled us in the war they're a rotten lot—ay, putrid! I've no doubt the country has been sold—is sold every day of its life; but no Des Comptes ever sold his honour. Why should he? For money? Not likely! He always had all the money he wanted.'

'And you think?'

'I don't know what to think. You see, I know nothing of the men he was among. But I know him—have known him ever since he was a baby—and I say he did not do this thing; and if I could find the man who has made the

world believe he did—*gr-r-r-r-r!*—I would wring his rascally head off.’

‘The clue, then, can only be found in Paris?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘And you don’t know the circumstances of the case?’

‘I know practically nothing, except that Gaston des Comptes never did a dishonourable thing in his life.’

Beyond this rooted belief in the integrity of the house of Des Comptes, Vaurel had practically no knowledge of actual facts, and no amount of discussion availed to produce any further light on the case. He knew just what all the world knew, that, after a trial *in camera*, Gaston des Comptes had been condemned for treason; but of the grounds and proofs of the accusation the world knew nothing.

It was the day following this that Vaurel came down the path through the woods in a state of great excitement, with Boulot at his heels. He dropped on to the bench where I was sitting contemplatively watching the Château through my smoke, and burst out:

‘Monsieur, I have just seen the devil!’

‘Oh!’

‘Yes, *dame!* He came in by the morning train.’

‘Oh!’ said I again.

‘You remember my telling you of Captain Lepard?’

‘Let me see—which was he? You have told me so many interesting stories, my friend.’

‘He was the one who was shot from behind at Worth.’

‘I remember.’

‘Well, he is here. He is colonel now, I see.’

‘The shooting was not very effectual evidently.’

‘As I told you, monsieur.’

‘And so he’s come after you at last.’

‘No, monsieur; when I shoot a man I shoot him in front—unless he is a Prussian, of course.’

‘And what do you suppose brings this gentleman here, and how does he affect you?’

‘He has gone to the Château.’

‘The dickens he has!’

‘Exactly! That’s it! That is what I said, monsieur.’

‘What does he want at the Château?’

‘No good, whatever it is,’ said Vaurel, with conviction. ‘The man is brave enough when it comes to fighting; but he’s a bad man, and of an evil temper, and he was hated by his men. I have seen him more than once strike a man across the face with his cane at drill, and a man never forgets that kind of thing, monsieur. And as for the women—well! he had a reputation.’

‘What is he doing here, I wonder?’ I said gloomily.

‘Maybe he is on Monsieur Gaston’s business.’

‘That is possible.’

‘If he is mixed up in it, good-bye to Monsieur

Gaston. And if it gives him any hold on mademoiselle the good God help her.’

‘Why should it give him any hold on mademoiselle?’

‘I cannot say; but if it does he is the man to make the most of it.’

The arrival of this man, upon whom I had never set eyes, and of whom I had never heard except from Vaurel, and his presence at the Château, caused me quite unaccountable discomfort. There might be a dozen good reasons for his being there; but the simple fact that he was there was sufficient to make me hate him. I took myself to task for feeling so, and hated him all the more.

I saw him walking with mademoiselle on the terrace more than once; but he seemed to keep to the grounds of the Château; and though I rambled about the village and along the road to the Château gates, I never got a nearer sight of him.

And now I was surprised by another most unexpected arrival, which strengthened tenfold all my determination to see the matter through, and to be at hand in case mademoiselle should find herself able to avail herself of any assistance I could offer her.

As Vaurel and I turned into the little inn one evening after a long day’s fishing down the river towards Bessancy, we found a stranger at table and already half-way through his dinner.

He replied to our ‘Good-day,’ and then, with a laugh which was certainly not one of pleased surprise, cried, ‘*Diable!* it is the Englishman again. How goes it, monsieur?’

‘*Hola*, Monsieur Roussel!’ I exclaimed; ‘it is quite an unexpected pleasure to meet you once more.’

From the grin with which he greeted this I have no doubt he judged fairly accurately the amount of pleasure I felt at sight of him.

‘Monsieur is stopping in the neighbourhood?’ he asked.

‘Yes; I am here for the fishing;’ and I held up my string of trout.

‘You have been fortunate,’ he said. ‘It is a pretty stream. I have come for some painting.’

‘Ah! I thought you went in mostly for portraits?’

‘On occasion,’ he laughed ‘But it is not good to confine one’s self to one line. I try my hand at historical subjects now and again’—and he grinned reminiscently—‘and it is good also to come to Nature herself at times.’

Jeanne supplied us with our soup, and we fell to with keen appetites.

‘I am delighted to find you here,’ he said presently. ‘Your French is not the most fluent, monsieur; but it is at all events understandable, whereas the language of the natives hereabouts is of the most barbarous.’ And Vaurel scowled at him from under his brows.

I was thinking that from this man I could probably learn the actual facts of young Des Comptes's trouble, and I promised myself to cultivate him with that end in view. I was wondering, also, how soon he would broach the subject of mademoiselle, for that she was the object of his visit I had not, of course, a moment's doubt.

He made no reference to her, however, but chatted away on matters Parisian in a way that drew a reluctant interest even from Vaurel, who had been inclined to treat him with the brusque indifference, amounting almost to rudeness, with which the man of the soil cloaks his native shyness in the presence of a stranger to whom he owes no allegiance, and whose assumption of superiority—and even his presence—he sometimes resents.

Roussel retailed for our benefit all the latest doings of the various worlds of Paris; and when he had got down below the half-world and well on to the quarter, Mère Thibaud, contrary to her custom, packed Jeanne off to bed and settled herself in her corner, with a piece of knitting, to enjoy the talk of the stranger. Jeanne, before she went, came over to me and whispered that she hoped I would not mind the gentleman having to share my room; and, though I did not much relish the prospect, I could but nod acquiescence.

Roussel did most of the talking, and Mère Thibaud and Vaurel did most of the listening. For myself, his scandalous rattle had absolutely no interest and still less attraction. It was probably his perception of this that made him turn to me at last and ask:

'And Mlle. X., monsieur—have you succeeded in making her acquaintance yet?' and at the word it seemed to me that Vaurel pricked up his ears and became suddenly alert.

'I have not, M. Roussel.'

'Ah! you do not turn your opportunities to account.'

'Perhaps so.'

'She is here at the Château—is she not?'

'I believe so.'

'And M. l'Abbé Dieufoy is there also to take care of her—is it not so?'

'M. l'Abbé is there also.'

'And Madame the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Combours came down in the same train as myself, and has also gone to the Château. Mademoiselle is to be well guarded. You are evidently looked upon with suspicion, monsieur.'

'And M. le Colonel Lepard is also at the Château,' said Vaurel.

'Lepard!' cried Roussel, his face blackening at the news.

'What does he want there, monsieur?' asked Vaurel.

'Want? What should he want but what they

all want—mademoiselle, or at all events mademoiselle's fortune. Lepard!' he said again after a pause. 'Heavens! When did he come?'

'Three days ago.'

'And mademoiselle has been living in the same house with Colonel Lepard for three days! She won't have a rag of reputation left.'

'It is her own house, and the priest is there,' I said curtly.

'Oh—the priest!' he said hotly. 'The priest wants the money. Lepard wants both the money and mademoiselle, or as much of them as he can get. Between them they are quite capable of making a bargain to divide the spoils.'

Vaurel was wriggling uncomfortably in his chair. Roussel's hidden meanings, more than his words, awoke in me the usual strong inclination to punch his head.

'He has got an evil reputation, this Colonel Lepard, you must know,' he said, swinging back his chair on to its hind-legs and lighting another cigarette. 'It was his unpleasant attentions to mademoiselle which got him and young Gaston to loggerheads. Lepard is on the General Staff'—

'Rotten as punk,' interjected Vaurel.

'Ay, rotten as punk,' continued Roussel, 'and it was the General Staff that accused Des Comptes and condemned him. I would bet a thousand to one Colonel Lepard had his finger in that pie. First he gobbles the brother in order to clear the way to the sister; and now he is here to gobble the sister—unless'—He added, with an unpleasant laugh, some expressions which were quite beyond my limited knowledge of the language.

At that Vaurel, whose anger had been steadily rising with every reference to the family, swept round his brawny arm, and Roussel rolled over on the floor, chair and all.

'Thousand demons! What is it, you crazy buffoon?' gasped the artist, spitting out bits of the cigarette which the fall had driven down his throat.

Vaurel stood over him swinging his chair in his big hand. 'You dirty dog!' he said hotly, 'speak another word of mademoiselle and I'll knock your ugly brains out.'

'Who's saying anything against your mademoiselle?' said Roussel.

'You were, pig. You meant that mademoiselle was no better than she should be. If you open your mouth again I'll ram this chair-leg down your throat.'

He stood over him for a couple of minutes; but Roussel showed no intention of offering an opening for the chair-leg; and at last Vaurel banged down his chair and sat on it with his back to the enemy.

'Things like that should not be allowed to live,' he growled to me; 'they are only fit to be squashed under an honest man's boot.'

At the first sign of trouble Mère Thibaud had

discreetly betaken herself to her bedroom, so we were alone.

Roussel, with venomous glances at Vaurel, gathered himself gingerly into a sitting posture, then lighted another cigarette and sat smoking it. Conversation was impossible after this little outbreak, and presently Vaurel rose and bade me good-night without another look at Roussel.

As soon as he was gone the other got up, and, to my surprise, said quietly, 'He was right, and I was wrong. Those things should not have been said. All the same, monsieur, it is dangerous

to the reputation of mademoiselle for this Colonel Lepard to be at the Château.'

The mildness of his tone, where I expected an outburst of anger, astonished me greatly. I looked curiously at him; but his eyes were fixed gloomily on the fire, and it was probably only the reflection of the smouldering logs that gleamed in them. All the same, I made up my mind to warn friend Vaurel to be on his guard, for, from the little I knew of Roussel, I believed him capable of repaying that hasty blow with compound interest.

A RUN TO CRÉCY.



CRÉCY, where, in 1346, our bowmen, with the sun at their backs, made such an example of the French with the sun in their eyes, is an interesting little village easy to reach from the main north line between Boulogne and Paris. The average Englishman going south from the Channel may be excused for not leaving the train at Abbeville and making for the fields of beetroot and heavy-headed oats which surround the red-bricked little town some twenty kilometres to the north. He reflects perhaps that even a patriotic thrill may be dearly purchased at the cost of a night in a poor yet populous bed, the excitements of which are preceded by such dismal fare as a remote little place like Crécy may offer him under the great name of dinner; but of course the cyclist can afford to scorn such fears. Crécy is twenty kilometres from Hesdin in the north as well as from Abbeville in the south. There are good hotels in both places, and what are twenty kilometres on French roads?

However, this is a personal narrative, and I confess I slept at Crécy, and took my chance. Leaving Abbeville rather late in the afternoon of a stormy September day, I was soon fighting the wind on the higher land outside the town. Blue-bloused peasants were cutting the oats and binding them as fast as possible on both sides of the hedgeless road, which was none of the best, though it would have been tolerable enough if the wind had kindly dropped or gone to the right-about. The local ladies wear their skirts short, and the small girls make themselves picturesque, though eccentric, with white tight-fitting skull-caps. It seemed to me that I understood those features in them: the lusty wind from the Channel could get scant purchase on them when thus clad.

By-and-by there was a hurricane, so that it was futile to attempt to ride against it. Twigs of trees from afar came whistling across the road like the bolts from our bowmen against the French in A.D. 1346; and the merry sons and daughters of toil in the fields had to clutch their sheaves,

or it seemed so, to keep them from enriching the harvest of the next farmer. In fact, at the hamlet of Marcheville, which may be twelve kilometres from Abbeville, I was so worried by the gale that I rested by a wayside cross. A little maid, blown before the wind, lisped her 'Monsieur!' of salutation in the gracious local way as she volleyed past me; but she could by no means stop to tell me which of the roads at this junction went towards Crécy. Happily, a gendarme of portly build, with a face like an intellectual beetroot, followed the little maid, and could stop. He gave me the necessary information, and then became genially sarcastic.

'Monsieur wishes no doubt to see where the battle was. The English have good memories as touching that small affair,' he said.

Quite casually I hinted that after Crécy I hoped to ride to Agincourt. Thereupon the good gendarme spread his palms and shrugged.

'I cannot wait,' he said, with a laugh. 'Who knows? Monsieur may mention Waterloo next. But, nevertheless, we French have won battles as well as lost them.'

Nor did he wait, or else I should have endeavoured to explain to him that it is just because his forefathers were such valiant battle-winners that we English are so proud of looking upon the French landscapes which anciently we decorated with our flags of victory. Perhaps, too, had he been patient, I should have given him the opinion of experts about this same fight of Crécy. There were brave men on both sides; but our advantage of position was immense. We were on the heights (though there is nothing at Crécy worthy of the name of hill), and the French chose to march at us up a greasy slope, which made them 'skid' badly. Further, there was the confusing sun in their eyes. When our arrows joined issue against them with the sun and the slippery clay, and crashed upon their eyes 'so thick that it seemed snow,' our Black Prince had as good as won the day. I am sure the gendarme would have appreciated these remarks, even if they were not very new to him; but he

went his way instead, and the hurricane in the small of his broad back prevented him shrugging his shoulders, as I doubt not he would have continued to do for five minutes after our separation.

The rest of the road to Crécy was across what might be termed very gradually rolling uplands. The air, barring the force of it, was splendid: tonic as the champagne I had drunk the previous day in Messrs Pommery's cellars at Rheims. But it did not agree with the cycle's constitution until we had turned the top of the higher lands to the south, and could descend into the hollow of the battlefield—a broad, bare trench going north-west and south-east, on this day purpled with beetroot.

Crécy was welcome, and so was I, if the landlady of the Golden Cannon Inn could be believed. The town is a snug little place, by no means greatly different from certain of our Kentish towns. This must be said, though: that no self-respecting Kentish man would set the word 'bookseller' above his shop and then point to wall-papers, bottles of ink, school copy-books, and manuals of French history, and exclaim, 'I have no books but these!' Further, the Kentish landlord who put his patrons on such a cut-throat beverage as the cider of the Crécy inn would very soon become notorious and poor; and further still, one does not see many such fine clusters of black grapes to the façades of Kentish houses as were here decorating most admirably the mellow red bricks of the Crécy fronts.

It rained and it blew hard that night, so that I missed the pleasure of a moonlight ramble about the battlefield. A very courteous young Frenchman who boarded for his sins at the 'Golden Cannon' had volunteered to explain all the landscape to me. 'We have good hearts, we Frenchmen,' he said, 'and we do not disguise from ourselves that we were beaten in 1346.' I sat next to him at the *table d'hôte* dinner, which was quite the most melancholy festival of the kind I have ever enjoyed in France. The soup was of cabbage and the beefsteaks were of horse. Lest I seem to libel the poor little inn's beefsteaks, I hasten to add that the three town officials and others who sat down with long faces and impatient waistcoats to this sad repast all agreed that they were 'cheval.' Our beverage, as I have said, was the most rasping cider in the world. When all was over we rose as one man with such emotions as might be conceived to be in the mind of a scheming bridegroom who has just wedded extreme ugliness and discovered that the money belongs to the pretty sister after all. The landlady's reputation as a manageress was not, I am sure, undeserved. No one but a Frenchwoman could constrain men to sit at her table day after day to such banquets.

I was up at half-past six the next morning to greet the sunshine that had followed the rain. Madame the landlady was also up at that useful hour. With her own hands she brought me hot

milk and coffee in large bowls; and while I partook of these and rolls in combination, she prattled of the quiet pleasures of life in Crécy. 'We do not possess the excitements of Paris, I agree,' she said; 'but what would you have? It is better to breathe a pure air and eat homely food.' Honest, thrifty soul! I paid my bill and went forth to see the town and the battlefield, and to finish my run to Hesdin ere the rain continued its attentions.

The old church and an old market-cross in the square near it are both worth inspection. The red bricks of the church walls were as mellow and bright with lichen as the houses of the town; and the chestnut-trees by its porch yield a shade which the Crécy gossips no doubt relish in the dog-days. Inside, it has not very much to engross; one expects such great things from French churches that its deficiencies seem more considerable than they are. But on this bright September morning the interior was made lustrous by the presence of a number of nuns in spotless white, solemnly receiving the sacrament. A somewhat profane common person in a clean blue smock took snuff as he contemplated the scene, and remarked to me, 'That makes a pretty picture, *ma foi!*' It was even more than that.

Of the battlefield one sees without difficulty everything that remains to be seen. The old mill by which our Edward the Third stayed with his reserves while the Black Prince won the day and his spurs, has been removed only within the last twelve years. It is a pity it had to go; but one may sympathise also with the French proprietor of it: he must have got rather weary of seeing exultant Britons standing at its base and looking at the wheat-fields and acres of beetroot below with pride in their hearts. But the site, of course, is not so readily removable; and any one may from this capital vantage-ground understand with what precision the English king could follow the details of the combat which ended in the wreck of the hopes of his brother of France.

The eight trees and the cross are the most conspicuous objects remaining on the battlefield, where, as the old rhymers says, the 'Franche men put tham to pine.' Why they are coupled together one does not know. The trees are by no means old like the cross, and can have had no concern in the battle. But I was told twice that it behoved me to see the trees, and so I looked at them; and very unhappy they were in the renewal of the gale which set in at about seven o'clock. They bent and groaned towards the old cross, which, according to the very credible legend, marks the spot where the blind king of Bohemia was found dead after the battle. There is no inscription on the cross; and when this cross is completely worn away by the winds and the rains, one may doubt if France will take the trouble to give it a successor.

From the battlefield we rode forward along the

hedgeless road, and soon left the little town hidden in its somewhat humid hollow. The village of Wadicourt is passed at two kilometres distance, nor tempts to a pause, though it is pretty enough with its vine-clad cots and bowers of honeysuckle and clematis round about a church with a slated spire. The plough, the scythe, and the flail are all at work here simultaneously. Cows are lowing in the deep grass, and larks singing above the cows. A row of eleven men and women making their breakfast by the roadside respond to the greeting of '*Bon appétit!*' with a chorus of '*Salut!*' The little children trotting to school lift their eyes and whisper '*Monsieur!*' One of them has tarried behind his comrades to put some fresh-plucked wheat on a wayside shrine of red brick to Our Lady of the Fields, beneath whose effigy are words entreating her protection; and the pure, good wind whistles from the west, and roars in the little patches of woodland close at hand.

A much more winsome village is that of Dompierre, in a glen with the pellucid Authie flowing through it. It possesses an aged church of the same period as Crécy's, and a castellated mill, which no artist could pass without sketching. There is a humble inn here, with the significant sign of 'The Sun Shines for all the World.' One can guess at the placid, contented souls of the

villagers who come to this inn to take their morning and evening cider and discuss the Dompierre events. Had they been less easy-going, perhaps there would have been fewer flints on the road. But as they do not cycle much in this part of Picardy, the crime could well be pardoned.

Rapechy and Dompierre adjoin, and are equally suggestive of tranquillity. Beyond them both there was little to halt for until Hesdin came in view from a ridge. Little; yet something. A certain shrine of St Hubert on a knoll of forest, and with gaunt hawthorns surrounding it, cannot fail to interest the Englishman unused to such things. There are rude effigies of St Hubert, the stag, a dog, a horse, and a tree with a bird in it, all so very rude that a child might have moulded them and painted them according to his fancy. But they are all eminently picturesque, considering where they are.

This may be said, too, of the snug Hôtel de France of Hesdin and its admirable old garden, in which my run from Abbeville *via* Crécy terminated: the military do not disdain to take their meals in this hotel; and where they establish the lead no ordinary civilian need fear to follow. It was not necessary here to consume cabbage-soup, 'cheval,' and rough cider in default of 'nothing.

ARRECIFOS.

By LOUIS BECKE.

CHAPTER VI.—MRS TRACEY TELLS HER STRANGE STORY.



MRS TRACEY listened with the most intense interest to Barry's account of his first meeting with Captain Rawlings; of the strange, mysterious midnight sailing of the *Mahina* from Sydney Harbour; and of the story of her husband's suicide, as related by the captain to his newly-engaged chief-mate on the following day, when he came on deck and said that Tracey was dead.

'It may be that my poor husband did indeed take his own life,' she said; 'but I do not believe it.'

'Yet why should they—Rawlings and the others—have spared him so long?' inquired Barry.

'Neither Barradas nor Rawlings was a navigator,' replied Mrs Tracey quickly.

'Ah! I see,' and the chief-officer stroked his beard thoughtfully; 'but yet, you see, Rawlings would have sailed without a navigator on board had he not met me on the wharf that night.'

'Perhaps so; yet I do not think it. He has the cunning of Satan himself.'

'Indeed he has, ma'am,' broke in Joe.—'Why, sir,' turning to Barry, 'the night we sailed he

drugged the Custom-House officer, and flung him into the dinghy. Then, when you was for'ard heavin' up anchor, the Greek and two of the native chaps took him ashore, and chucked him down on the wharf.'

'The scoundrel!' exclaimed Barry, thinking of the letter he had written to Rose Maynard that night. 'But how do you know this?'

'I been tell Joe jus' now,' said one of the native seamen. 'De captain gave me an' Billy Onotoa ten shilling to take that man ashore with the bos'un. An' he say if we tell any one he kill us by-an'-by.'

'The ruffian!' muttered Barry.

'Now that you have told me your own story, Mr Barry,' said Mrs Tracey excitedly, 'let me tell you mine from the beginning, and show you how this heartless wretch has imposed upon you from the first. The tale he has given you is a tissue of lies, interwoven with a thread of truth.'

'I can well believe it. Many things which have hitherto puzzled me seem now to be clear enough.'

'Nearly two years ago,' began Mrs Tracey, 'my husband owned and sailed a small cutter of thirty tons, trading among the Marshall and Caroline

Islands. His headquarters were at Jaluit, in the Marshall Islands, where he had a store, and where I lived whilst he was away on his cruises. During the seven years we spent among these islands I would often accompany him, for it was very lonely on Jaluit—only natives to talk to—and he would sometimes be away many months at a time.

'On our last voyage in the cutter we called in at Port Lèle on Strong's Island. Old Gurden, the trader there, and my husband had had business dealings with each other for many years. He was a good-hearted but very intemperate man, and several times we had taken him away with us in the cutter when he was in a deplorable condition from the effects of drink, and nursed him back to health and reason again. On this occasion we were pleased to find him well, though rather despondent, for he had, he said, an idea that his last carouse had "done for" him, and that he would not live much longer.

'That evening the old man told us the story of his life. It was truly a strange and chequered one. When quite a young man he had been flogged, and then deserted from H.M.S. *Blossom*—Captain Beechy—in 1825, and ever since then had remained in the South Seas, living sometimes the idle and dissolute life of the beach-comber, sometimes that of the industrious and adventurous trader. My husband was interested, for he liked the old fellow, who, in spite of his drunken habits, had many excellent qualities. For myself he always professed the greatest regard, and that evening he proved it.

'After he had finished his story he turned to my husband and said, "You and your wife have always been true friends to drunken old Jack Gurden. Now, tell me, did you ever know me to tell a lie except when I wanted to get a drink and hadn't any excuse?" We both laughed, and said we knew he was a truthful man. "Did you ever hear me talking about a lagoon full of pearl-shell when I was mad with drink?" he inquired. We laughed again, and said that he had done so very often. "Ah!" he said, "but it is true; there is such a place; and, now that my time is coming near, I'll tell you where it is. You, Mrs Tracey, who have nursed the old drunken blackguard beach-comber, and asked him to seek strength from God to keep off the cursed grog, will be one of the richest women in the world. I wrote it all down four or five months ago, in case when you came back here you found I was dead."

'Thereupon he handed my husband a number of sheets of paper, on one of which was drawn a rough plan of Arrecifos Island, or, as he called it, Ujilong. The rest contained clear and perfectly written details of the position of the pearl-shell beds.'

Barry nodded. 'He had lived there, I suppose?'

'For quite a number of years—from 1840 to

1846. He married one of the native women there. At that time over two hundred natives lived on these thirteen islands, and Gurden said he could quite understand why the richness of the pearl-beds was never discovered by white men, for no ship had ever entered the lagoon within the memory of any living native of the place, and not once in ten years had the people even seen a passing ship send a boat ashore.'

That this was true Barry knew, for he had often heard trading captains speak of Arrecifos and Eniwetok as great chains of palm-clad islets, enclosing lagoons through which there was no passage for ships.

'The natives themselves had no idea of the value to white men of the beds of pearl-shell; and, as a matter of fact, Gurden himself at that time did not think them of much value. Later on, after he left the island and visited China, he spoke to several merchants and traders there, and tried to induce them to send him back to the lagoon with a crew of divers; but, as he was usually drunk when he called on them, no one would listen to him. His story was merely regarded as the fiction of a drunken sailor.

'My husband did not so regard it. He had never been to Arrecifos, but knew something of it by its name of Ujilong—the group takes its name from the island off which you are anchored—as a place of very few inhabitants, who lived on a number of low islands covered with coco-nuts.

"Let us go there, and you can pilot me in," he said to Gurden. The old man agreed with alacrity. Taking him on board, we sailed the following morning, and reached this place five days later. He took us in safety through the south-east passage; and the moment we landed he was recognised and welcomed by the people as one returned from the dead.

'We remained in the lagoon for three months, and during that time Gurden and my husband, aided by the willing natives, obtained ten tons of magnificent shell, and more than a thousand pounds' worth of pearls. Those which Rawlings showed you were some belonging to us; I suppose he found them in my husband's cabin after murdering him. They had often been shown to both Rawlings and Barradas on board the *Mahina*, for my husband was, as I will show you later on, the most unsuspicious and confiding of men.

'Convinced that there were indeed at least some hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of pearl-shell to be easily obtained, if he could secure experienced native divers from the equatorial islands—for these people here are not good divers—my husband decided to go to Honolulu, sell the cutter and the pearl-shell we had obtained, and then with the money he had on hand, which amounted to about eleven hundred pounds, buy a larger vessel, secure a number of good divers, and return to the lagoon, on one of

the islands of which he intended to make his home for perhaps many years. Arrecifos, he knew, did not belong to any nation; and both he and old Gurden thought that the British Consul at Honolulu would give us what is, I think, called a "letter of protection," whereby a British subject hoisting the British flag upon any of the Pacific islands can, with the approval of a naval officer and the concurrence of the native inhabitants, purchase it, and get protection from the British Government.

'He wished Gurden to remain until we returned. The old man, however, said it would be too lonely for him, but that if we took him back to Strong's Island he would be content to await our return there. The long voyage to Honolulu, he thought, would be too much for him; and, besides that, he wished to return to Strong's Island, if only to say farewell to its people, with whom he had lived for so many years. After that he would be content to end his days with us on Arrecifos.

'Returning to Strong's Island, we landed Gurden, and after a long and wearisome voyage reached Honolulu. My husband sold the pearl-shell for a thousand pounds—about half its value—and the cutter and the rest of the cargo for six hundred pounds, bought the *Mahina*, and at once began to fit her out and ship an entirely new crew, for the nine men we had with us on the cutter wanted to remain in Honolulu and spend their wages. Undoubtedly some of these men talked about the lagoon and the discovery of the pearl-shell, and were the primary cause of the misfortunes which were to befall us.

'One morning Manuel Barradas came on board and asked my husband if he was in want of a chief-mate. He was, and being satisfied with the man's appearance and qualifications, at once engaged him; and then Barradas said he knew of a very good man as second-mate. This was Paul the Greek.

'A few days before we sailed, Barradas told my husband that he had met a former acquaintance of his, who would like to take passage in the brig for the entire cruise, merely for the pleasure of visiting these little-known islands, and that he was prepared to pay liberally. In the evening Barradas brought his friend on board, and introduced him as Mr Rawlings. My husband and he had quite a long talk. Rawlings was himself a sailor, and had made, he said, a good deal of money as recruiter in the Kanaka labour-trade between Fiji and the Solomon Islands; but was tired of idling away his time in Honolulu, and thought that among the Caroline or Marshall group he might perhaps find an island whereon he could settle as a trader.

'My poor husband fell into the trap devised for him by these three men. Rawlings came on board as passenger, and we sailed direct for

Strong's Island to pick up Gurden. To our great sorrow, we found that the old man was dead and buried—had died a week previously. He had made a will leaving all of his share and interest in the venture to me.

'To a certain extent Barradas had my husband's confidence; but neither he nor Rawlings knew either the name or position of this place—whatever other information they had was obtained from our former crew. They had afterwards, however, thoroughly ingratiated themselves with Mr Tracey; and, though he had not actually revealed to them the name or position of Arrecifos, they knew pretty well everything else concerning it.

'After leaving Port L'ile we steered south-west for the Ellice Islands, where my husband knew he could obtain a crew of divers (we could get none in Honolulu); and then, besides divers, he also intended to engage about ten or a dozen families of Ellice Islanders to settle down here permanently, for the British Consul had given him a temporary "letter of protection" and authorised him to hoist the British flag on Arrecifos Lagoon. The Consul strongly advised him to proceed to Sydney and lay his case before the Commodore of the Australian squadron, who, he said, would no doubt send a warship to Arrecifos and take formal possession of the place as British territory. This advice my husband decided to follow. He also meant to buy some diving-suits and pumping-gear; for Gurden had said that he believed the best shell in the lagoon was to be obtained at a depth of eighteen fathoms—too deep for the ordinary native method of diving. You can imagine my delight when he told me that we should be going to Sydney; for that town is my native place, and it was there that we were married seven years ago. We would often talk of what a beautiful home we should make there in the course of a few years.'

Here her fast-falling tears choked her utterance, and Barry bade her rest a while. She obeyed him, and for some ten minutes or so no sound broke the silence but the ever-restless clamour of the surf upon the outer reef, and now and then a whispered word exchanged between the native seamen, who, seated at the other end of the house, regarded her with their dark eyes full of sympathy.

'We made a direct course for the Ellice Islands,' resumed Mrs Tracey, 'and met with light winds till we were near Pleasant Island, when it began to blow steadily from the north-west. We sighted Pleasant Island just before dark, and at half-past eight we could see the lights of the native villages on the shore. That evening my husband had turned in early, for he was not feeling well, and complained of a severe headache. I remained with him till past nine o'clock, and then, seeing that he had fallen asleep, went on deck for some fresh air, for the cabin was very hot and stuffy.

'No one was on the poop but the man at the wheel—a Hawaiian native. Barradas was somewhere on the main-deck, for I heard his voice talking to some of the men.

'I had brought on deck a rug and my pillow; and, telling the man at the wheel to call me at four bells, if I were asleep, I lay down at the back of the wheel-house, so as to be out of the way of the officer of the watch, and out of sight. I had been lying down for about ten minutes, and was wide awake, when Paul the Greek came aft and told the helmsman to go for'ard and stay there till he was wanted.

'In a lazy sort of a way, I wondered why the second-mate should do this, as it was not his watch on deck; but in another minute or so I heard Rawlings's voice:

"Where is Manuel, Paul?"

"He's coming in a minute," replied the Greek.

"Are you sure the skipper is asleep?"

"Yes," answered Rawlings; "and she is with him. There's no fear of her coming on deck."

'What did they mean? I thought. What did Rawlings, who always was most polite and agreeable to me, mean by speaking in this way?

'I had not long to wait, for presently Barradas joined them, and the three began talking together.

"Can't we make an end of the thing at once and settle them both together?" asked the Greek in his vile jargon.

"Don't be a fool, Paul," answered Rawlings savagely; "we don't want to run our necks into a noose. We want something more than the ship. We want to find out the name of the island, and where it is, before we can do anything like that; and if we find it out to-night, and settle him and his wife, how are we to get to the lagoon without a navigator?"

"True," said Barradas; "but have you had a good look through his cabin for the plan old Gurden gave him?"

"Yes, several times," he answered.

"Perhaps she has it," said Barradas.

"Not she," said Rawlings impatiently; "he doesn't suspect us. Why should he give it to her? No; he has put it away in some place, where only a careful search would find it, and that search can't be made just now. And we don't want it now. When we do want it I can find it. Now, listen to me, and I'll show you how we can do the thing properly."

'A wild impulse to rush past them, rouse my husband, and tell him of the murderous plot that was brewing against his life and mine, for a moment or two held possession of me, Mr Barry; but I resisted it only through fear of their seeing me. Would to God that I had acted upon that impulse, for I believe the crew would have stood by us. But I lay perfectly quiet, and listened, while that smiling fiend Rawlings unfolded his

scheme of treachery and murder to his fellow-villains.

'They could do nothing, he said, until the brig arrived at Sydney. Then, after my husband—whom he called a "silly, unsuspecting ass"—had seen the Commodore, bought all the stores and trade goods needed for the native divers, and also the diving-suits and pumping-gear, he (Rawlings) would find a man capable of navigating the vessel; and then, he said, with a laugh that sent a thrill of terror through me, "we can get rid of him and his wife easily enough, once we are at sea again. They will, I think, both fall overboard soon after we leave Sydney—eh, Paul? Then, my friends, we shall find Gurden's chart and written description of the lagoon easily enough; and, with a navigator on board, we shall continue the voyage, and sail to the fortune awaiting us."

"How can you get such a man without exciting wonder in the captain's mind?" asked Barradas.

"Leave it to me, my dear, doubting Manuel," replied Rawlings in his mocking voice.

'At that moment four bells struck, and another native sailor came aft to take the wheel; and I, after waiting for a minute or two and hearing no further talk, concluded that Rawlings and the Greek had left the poop, and only Barradas remained. I rose and peered cautiously round the corner of the wheel-house to see if I could escape below without being observed; and then the Greek sprang on me from behind, grasped me by the waist, and, carrying me to the rail, flung me overboard.

'When I came to the surface the brig was quite a hundred yards or more away from me, and I could only dimly discern her through the darkness. I raised my voice, and screamed and screamed again; but in a few minutes she had disappeared into the night; and then I tried to give my soul to God, for I knew that the cruel wretches—one of whom had thrown me overboard—would not try to save me.

'How long I continued swimming I cannot tell—it might have been only a few minutes, it might have been an hour or more, for I am a good swimmer—but suddenly I saw a light quite near, and I cried out—so I was told afterwards—"For God's sake, save me!"

'When I regained consciousness I found myself on board a little cutter bound from Pleasant Island to Ocean Island, a hundred and twenty miles away. The master and owner of the cutter was a German trader named Ohlsen, living on Pleasant Island. He treated me most kindly; and when we arrived at Ocean Island, and I lost my reason for many weeks, he nursed me like a mother, and delayed his return to Pleasant Island till I recovered, so that I could go back there with him, and live with his wife and family till some whaling-vessel visited there and I could get a passage to some port in either China or Japan.

'But I had no desire to go there. I knew

that if my husband escaped the murderous designs of Rawlings and his fellow-criminals he would return to Arrecifos; and to Arrecifos I determined to go, even if only to die. Whale-ships—so my rescuer told me—frequently called at Ocean and Pleasant Islands on their way to the north-west Carolines and Japan, and I decided to remain on the lonely little spot and wait for one.

‘Six weeks after I landed on Ocean Island, the *Golden City*, of New Bedford, called there. I went on board and told the captain so much of my story as I thought necessary, and asked him to land me in Arrecifos. He did so, and gave me a stock of food and clothing materials. God bless his long, narrow, leather-hued American face and his kindly gray eyes! I shall never forget him.

‘He landed me here five months ago. The people knew me at once, and made me very welcome. I told them that I did not know if my husband was alive or dead, but that I had come here to wait. The affection they cherished for old Gurden was very strongly shown when I told them of his death; and I am now living with the relatives of the woman he married here so many years ago.

‘When your boat was seen sailing down the lagoon this afternoon the natives were very frightened, thinking another “man-stealing ship,” as they call the Hawaiian labour-vessels, was making a second raid upon them. The village on the little island where you are anchored was surprised by the crew of one of these vessels in the night, and every adult person, male and female, seized, handcuffed and carried on board.

It is now deserted. They, as well as myself, knew that if my husband had returned he would have sailed his ship right down here, to this end of the lagoon, where he had anchored previously, instead of lying under the south-east islet. Most of them, therefore, at once took to the bush to hide themselves, and begged me to come with them. But I was determined to go and meet the boat, for I had a hope that I might possibly hear some news of the *Mahina*, and feared that perhaps the boat would only remain a short time and return to the ship before I could get to her. I did not even stay to put on my one pair of boots, but set off at a run; these two young women coming with me, poor creatures, although they were dreadfully frightened. When within half a mile of where you landed I stepped upon a *foli* hidden in the sand, and gave myself this terrible cut.’

Barry took her hand between both of his and pressed it sympathetically. ‘Poor lady! you have indeed suffered. Now listen to me, and I will tell you what I propose doing to outwit these infernal ruffians and restore to you your husband’s ship. The heartless scoundrels, pirates, and murderers! They shall themselves work for your good.—Joe, and you, Velo, come closer.—These men, Mrs Tracey, will stand by us; and so, I think, will every other man on board.’

‘Indeed we will, sir,’ said Joe.

‘Now, this is my plan,’ said Barry.

It did not take him long to explain it, and then, one by one, each man of his boat’s crew took his hand and that of Mrs Tracy, and swore to be true to them both.

WANTED, THE PIED PIPER!

By Mrs J. E. WHITBY.



WITHOUT any declaration of war, with no sound of trumpet or beat of drum, certain inhabitants of Germany are quietly invading and occupying the country of Belgium.

It has long been known that France has greedy eyes on this rich little country; but that Germany, which is usually supposed to covet primarily Holland, should be silently pouring her hordes over her Belgian neighbour’s frontier is somewhat astonishing. It is the more remarkable, inasmuch as the invasion is proceeding almost unnoticed even by the two countries most concerned, and certainly unnoticed by the great military Powers of Europe.

The integrity of Belgium is, as is well known, guaranteed by Great Britain; but even she will in this case probably not be able to prevent an occupation of territory as unexpected as undesirable.

Fortunately for the prospects of Continental

peace, the invaders, though in large force, and threatening all the destruction to crop and store which must be expected on the arrival of the enemy in great numbers, wear no helmet or plume, carry no cruel rifle or sword, and, though they be clad in coats of uniform colour, leave no masses of slain behind them. Still, though they come in peace, their presence is none the less precursive of danger to property if not to life; and a cry of alarm is beginning to make itself heard from the prosperous and highly-cultivated districts into which these unwelcome invaders—marmot rats, known in Germany as the hamster—are advancing day by day.

The marmot is a native of central Europe, and usually confines its peregrinations to the western boundary. In 1842 a similar incursion took place in the province of Liège; but the raiders were successfully routed, and were believed to have disappeared entirely from Belgium. Now news has come that the dreaded rodents have lately crossed

the Meuse and appeared in the province of Namur in ranks and squadrons.

The hamster is an animal of the size of the large brown Norway rat, and with similar dental formation. With her usual thoughtfulness, Nature has provided it with a coat of neutral tint, the better to escape detection, its fur being of a grayish-brown on the surface, black underneath, and with white markings under the throat. It is a pretty little animal, with a short, shaggy tail and white paws, is very quick in its movements, and easily tamed in captivity. What renders it especially remarkable is that it has cheek-pouches, one on either side, with the openings inside the mouth. These extraordinary organs, which the rodent can distend at pleasure, are alone, of all the mammals of Europe, possessed by the hamster. They serve a very useful and economic purpose, too—the transport to his underground lair of the really important quantity of cereals which he contrives to secure. It has been calculated that each animal can lodge from one to one and a half ounces in each cheek-pouch; it is not, therefore, surprising that considerably over two hundred pounds of food of various kinds have been found in the run of these creatures. What such wholesale depredations would amount to in a year only an unhappy farmer or the 'statistical fiend' could tell.

The runs are constructed with considerable ingenuity, and consist of a number of apartments; some being reserved as sleeping quarters, others as warehouses for provisions, and are approached by different galleries. It is in the month of August, at harvest-time, that he commences, like the prudent ant of fabled story, to lay up food for the winter. He then works hard, filling his cheek-pouches to bursting-point, and traverses the fields with the appearance of a suffering animal with a swollen face. He ransacks fields and barns, and carries off triumphantly all kinds of grain, peas, and beans to his burrow, where he empties his patent travelling-bags by slightly pressing them with his paws; and he also resorts to this expedient when he meets an enemy by the way whom circumstances compel him to fight, promptly unloading himself of his cargo, and rushing to the attack with all the ardour of one whose life is spent in marauding.

In his habits, it will be seen, the hamster resembles the mole, for as soon as the first faint chill of winter is felt he retires to his cosy nest, and, closing it alike to friend and foe, proceeds to live in luxury on the good things with which he so carefully and thoughtfully provided himself in summer. When the cold grows still more intense he curls himself comfortably up and sleeps until the spring appears.

In some parts of Germany the peasant inhabitants protect these animals. Too poor to be particular, they in their turn rob the rodent of the store of corn, &c., which he has with so much

work and intelligence accumulated for his own use. The female hamster has three litters of ten to twelve a year; and, despite their character for gentleness, these animals, when famine stares them in the face, will eat their neighbours or their own brothers without hesitation and with the strictest impartiality. Their bite is extremely dangerous; and it is said that when they have seized on any object, even the hand of a human being, only death itself will force them to relinquish their hold.

A visit from such self-invited robbers is, no doubt, greatly to be deplored; and it is to be hoped that, as in 1842, the intruders will be turned back to their own country. England has once more to thank her geographical position for keeping both human and animal would-be invaders at bay; and the Channel, which was answerable for the failure of Napoleon's plans to add England to his list of conquered countries, will fortunately prove an insuperable barrier—should he ever get as far—to the German hamster also.

TRAVELLER'S JOY.

The wild clematis which grows luxuriantly by many English roadsides is known to the country-folk as 'Old Man's Beard' and 'Traveller's Joy.' Any one who has noticed the wealth of blossoms in the summer and of fluffy seed-vessels in the winter will be struck by the aptness of the local names.

TWining, wreathing, softly drooping,

Flinging perfume to the breeze,

Sweet clematis sways the hedgerows

All across the golden leas,

Mocking all my frenzied fancies

With its glistering satin sheen,

As along the path I wander,

Musing on the Might-Have-Been.

Unforgiving words and cruel.

What now matters wrong or right?

And though bloom, in wanton brilliance,

Throws its bridal arches white

O'er the gateway where we parted,

Where I lost my darling boy—

All my heartstrings swept by sorrow,

What care I for 'Traveller's Joy'?

Winter comes: the welcome Winter!

To my musings more attune.

'Old Man's Beard' in hoary splendour

Decks the hedgerows 'neath the moon.

Hard as iron is the footpath,

Harder still my anguished heart;

Pride can scorn the neighbours' pity—

'Missing' . . . is the cruel part.

By the gateway sink I wearied,

All my soul for news athirst.

'Father! give me strength. Uphold me

Even should it prove the worst!' . . .

What is this? A touch—a murmur—

Tidings of my darling boy—

Changing in one rapturous moment

'Old Man's Beard' to 'Traveller's Joy.'

J. HARDY.